

**ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION**  
**4141 N. Third Street –Phoenix, AZ 85012**  
**Thursday – June 8, 2006**

**M I N U T E S**

**Call to Order** - The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman Ellis.

**Members Present**

Advisory Commission Members

Webb Ellis, Chairperson

Joe Bibich

Robert Boyd

Linda Fulkerson

Phillip Quochytewa

Kenneth Yamanouchi

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Mike Klier, Assistant Deputy Director

Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner

Mike Fugate, Office of Education

Lee Borgen, Vets' Benefit Counselor

**Members Absent**

Tom Dingwall, Acting Vice Chair

**Opening** - Minutes of the May 12 and May 13, 2006 meetings were approved as corrected.

**Communications**

Letters were sent to Sister Martha, Principal at the St. Peter Indian Mission School, and to Janie Miller, Adjutant for Veterans of Foreign Wars Post #1677, thanking them for hosting the May meetings. Spencer Ralston was thanked for sending Mark DeArman to attend the May 13 meeting and he was told that Mr. DeArmon did an excellent job making an impromptu presentation at the meeting. A fund raising packet was mailed to Mr. Thornton so that his organization can legally raise funds to host the next Stand Down in Yuma. A response was sent to the Capitol Times to their request to update their Citizen Government Guide.

The Commissioners received a notebook that outlines the procedure for travel claims. They were encouraged to document their odometer readings so that they are properly paid for their mileage. The 2006 Edition of the Veterans Benefits for Veterans and Dependents was also distributed during the meeting. Luella Emmons, Assistant Deputy Director in Charge of Veterans Service Division, provided the publications to serve as reference but asked the Commissioners to refer claims questions to her division. Cari James, American Indian veteran advocate, has promised to provide the Commission with a listing of contacts in Indian Country.

## **Agency Announcements and Updates**

Mike Klier, Assistant Deputy Director, provided information about recent agency actions:

- H.B. 2056 - Military support specialty license plates became law (Cha. 256) and he has been working with the Motor Vehicle Division to design the “freedom” plate. There is tremendous potential for raising funds by marketing these plates.
- He has been working with Larry Upton to have Manzanita Speedway dedicate an October event to veterans. The Governor and Fred Ferguson will be in attendance at the event and the Stock Car Racing Association will make a donation to the Veterans Donation Fund. Mr. Upton also has a connection with the Auto Trader and is willing to help market the “freedom plate.”
- The patio for the dementia unit at the Arizona State Veteran Home is essentially completed, after significant remodeling.
- The Governor authorized the lowering of the flag located at the state capitol on the day of a funeral for an Arizona casualty of war.
- After 3 letters soliciting the names of tribal representatives from all Arizona tribes, the first American Indian Veterans Commission was held yesterday. Attendance was limited, but it established important connections with the attendees.
- Veterans did better this year than in any other legislative session in Arizona history, in spite of continuing budget issues that are being worked out now.

Chairman Ellis asked about the Veterans Museum at the Steele Indian School Park. He asked if an Intergovernmental Service Agreement was being developed between the agency and the City of Phoenix. Mike Klier said that he would discuss this issue with Joan Sisco and report back to the Commission.

Commissioner Boyd offered a suggestion made by an attendee from the Casa Grande meeting. While the veterans do not mind paying more when they receive an actual license plate, they receive only a small (inexpensive) decal in subsequent years. The veteran asked if the \$8 fee for subsequent years could be deposited into the Veterans' Donation Fund. Mike Klier believed that the suggestion, in light of all the other legislation and budget issues, was not appropriate to pursue at this time.

Commissioner Quochytewa asked that the department notify tribes when an Arizona casualty will have a funeral, and asked if the Governor's commitment had been made in writing. Lee Borgen made copies of Mr. Klier's email for all of the attendees.

## **Budget**

While we are still waiting for the budget to be signed into law, it appears that the House and Senate have included total funding recommended by the Veterans Task Force (and approved by the Governor's Office of Strategic Planning and Budget) except for the additional 40 Veterans Benefits Counselors (VBCs) and 15 support staff. There is a commitment to fund 21 VBCs and 4 support staff in the Legislative budget, leaving the Department understaffed by 30 full-time employees. Chairman

Ellis asked the Commissioners to contact Ken Bennett at 602-926-5584, Jim Waring at 602-926-4916, and John Nelson at 602-926-5872 to inform them of the need to increase the actual number of counselors and support staff needed.

## **Region 1 Meeting Action Items**

### Actions to be taken as a result of the 5/12/06 meeting

Chairman Ellis will send a letter to Sandra Flint, Director of the VA Regional Office, and attach a copy of Noel Benoist's recommendations for her consideration. There were several items included in the list that are clearly outside the scope of the Advisory Commission and Chairman Ellis felt that the VA should be informed.

### Actions to be taken as a result of the 5/13/06 meeting

*Property tax assessment of veterans service organizations differ by county.* Chairman Ellis has assumed responsibility for this issue by default and will be offering information on this topic at a future meeting.

*Program of adopting an armory or reserve unit.* Ken Yamanouchi approached the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA). His organization is very supportive of the idea, but the organization has unfortunately adjourned for the summer. Further information will be provided to the Commission when the MOAA again meets in the fall.

*Education for families of casualties.* Commissioner Bibich suggested that all of the Commissioners look at the website [www.nasdva.com](http://www.nasdva.com) for information about what other states are doing for their veterans. He provided copies of four different programs that may be helpful to the Commissioners as they consider legislation for next year. He asked the Commission to consider who should qualify for the benefit and the following issues were discussed:

- Don't limit eligibility to KIA (Killed in Action). Include dependents of those service personnel who died in a war zone of other, non-combat causes.
- If the benefit would be offered to spouses as well as to the children of casualties, this may be a huge cost to the state and may create opposition.
- Mike Fugate discussed issues relating to a recent bill that proposed tuition waivers for dependents of Purple Heart recipients. He offered his assistance as the proposed legislation is being crafted, since he is familiar with the issues.
- Chairman Ellis suggested that Commissioner Bibich put together a proposal for consideration by the Advisory Commission before the next legislative session.
- The name of the bill may gain support and "Orphans, Widows and Widowers" was offered during the meeting as a title that would elicit support.

### *California Licensing Board program*

Commissioner Yamanouchi researched how California enacted their program. Before the legislators are involved; there must be support from the Arizona Hospital Association, Arizona State Board of Nursing, and several other key stakeholders. Commissioner Yamanouchi has assumed responsibility for working with these various organizations and is committed to enacting the program. It is not as simple, however,

as approaching the Legislature. This is a real win-win situation, benefiting newly discharged military personnel as well as the state of Arizona.

#### **Region 4 Meeting tentatively scheduled for August 2006**

##### *Considerations*

The American Indian veteran meeting held in Bapchule had 9 attendees. Chairman Ellis said that trust is a big issue on the reservation. As the Commission continues to hold these types of meetings, he believes there will be many more participants. Mike Klier said that he believes that trust will be built as he has a chance to spend more time with tribal representatives.

##### *Determine Location & Time*

The Commission has historically asked a veterans service organization to be the host and the American Legion was suggested. Commissioner Bibich will contact organizations in Bullhead City to secure a meeting place for Saturday 8/12/06.

The Hualapai, Supai, Havasupai, and Mohave Tribes are relatively close to Kingman and Bullhead City. Commissioner Quochytewa will work with Commissioner Bibich to make contacts with various local tribes and assist in finding a suitable location. Commissioners Bibich and Fulkerson will coordinate with Cari James to help advertise the meeting.

#### **Open Discussion / For the Good of the Order**

##### *Yuma Stand Down Follow Up*

Linda Fulkerson was recently in contact with Bill Thornton, who promised to forward a copy of the procedure manual he used for conducting the Stand Down in Yuma. He is sharing information with other communities that are also interested in offering a Stand Down to homeless veterans in their areas.

##### *Advisory Commissioner Orientation*

Commissioner Yamanouchi requested that a formal orientation be developed and offered to new Commissioners. Statutes and other regulations that speak about fund raising and other legal requirements should be included in an orientation manual to be given to the Commissioners. Commissioner Yamanouchi suggested that a quick "cheat sheet" could be developed to include critical issues to help the Commissioners.

Chairman Ellis indicated that he would pursue tentative plans for an agency orientation in conjunction with the regularly scheduled commission meeting on September 14. The meeting could run from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. with the orientation to follow that afternoon.

Also, there is no statutory requirement to hold monthly meetings, so the meeting could be an informal meeting where no official business takes place if the Commission chooses to dedicate the entire day to orientation.

### *Representation of the Advisory Commission*

Joe Bibich asked if it is permissible to write a letter to the editor of his local paper. Chairman Ellis encouraged all Commissioners to advocate for veterans. When a Commissioner is speaking on behalf of or otherwise representing the Advisory Commission, however, it is best to speak with the Chairperson before such action takes place.

### *Commission support to form a Veterans' Advisory Committee in the Flagstaff area*

Chairman Ellis attended the first Veterans Supermarket and learned that the Vice Mayor was interested in establishing a veterans committee for the City of Flagstaff. There may be other cities in the general area that interested in banding together to form a northern Arizona veterans advisory organization. Chairman Ellis will send a copy of the City of Phoenix Veterans Advisory Commission to the City of Flagstaff Vice Mayor to assist them.

### *Guest Comments*

Noel Benoist offered to assist the Commission with budget issues. Mr. Benoist prepared a comment card regarding a change to claims processing by the VA. Chairman Ellis suggested that he write up a proposal for consideration by the Commission.

### *City of Chandler*

Chairman Ellis will send a letter on behalf of the Commission to thank them for funding a veterans program for the City of Chandler. The \$55,000 investment will benefit veterans in their city and will serve as an example to other municipalities. Chairman Ellis will send out a copy of the congratulatory letter to other mayors, encouraging them to follow suit.

**Adjournment** – Meeting adjourned at 11:59 a.m. by acclamation. The next regular meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, July 13, 2006, at the Arizona State Veteran Home, located at 4141 N. Third Street, Phoenix, AZ 85012. This meeting will be attended by members of the American Indian Veterans Advisory Committee and will be held in Liberty Hall. All Commissioners are invited to stay for the AIVAC meeting starting at 1:30 p.m.